

**To: PAISLEY NORTH LOCAL AREA COMMITTEE**

**On: 10 November 2016**

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**Report by: DIRECTOR OF COMMUNITY RESOURCES**

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**Heading: The Former Royal Alexandra Infirmary (RAI) Building**

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**1. Summary**

- 1.1 The former Royal Alexandra Infirmary (RAI) building has become an attraction for anti-social behaviour since it fell into dereliction following its closure in 2005. This has been seen to increase over the past year.
  - 1.2 Despite daily visits from the Community Safety Wardens, Police Scotland and Scottish Fire and Rescue, incidents/complaints are still being raised.
  - 1.3 The residents in the adjacent properties at Alexandra Gate are directly affected by this property and therefore most complaints originate from these residents. A formal Residents Group (Residents Action Initiative) has been set up to liaise with relevant bodies and attempt to promote development of the building or bring it back into use.
  - 1.4 Renfrewshire Council has been in constant contact with the owner of the property to try to establish plans for the building and ensure that the site is secured to an appropriate standard. Renfrewshire Council has also undertaken work in default of a statutory notice issued to the owner to improve the security of the site.
  - 1.5 The Paisley Daily Express has written several articles on the RAI building and the affect this is having on local residents.
  - 1.6 Officers from Renfrewshire Council and other partners continue to visit daily to assess the issues with the former RAI building and the surrounding environment.
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## **2. Recommendations**

It is recommended that the Local Area Committee:

- 2.1 Notes the report and the work undertaken by Renfrewshire Council and other partners to alleviate issues relating to anti-social behaviour and secure the site.
  - 2.2 Notes the limitation of powers and legislation when it comes to privately owned land and this type of building.
  - 2.3 Notes the on-going work to try and ensure the site remains secured to prevent access.
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## **3. Background**

- 3.1 The former RAI site has been derelict since it closed in 2005.
  - 3.2 The site has changed owners on several occasions with the latest owner buying the property and land in 2012.
  - 3.3 The building is currently listed as a Category B Listed Building and is on the Buildings at Risk Register.
  - 3.4 Complaints of anti-social behaviour, drinking and graffiti have been received by the Council over a number of years.
  - 3.5 In 2016, there have been ghost hunters accessing the building as news has reached newspapers and social media.
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## **4. Renfrewshire Council – Actions to date**

- 4.1 Renfrewshire Council has been in dialogue with the owner of the property throughout 2016. This has included several site visits with residents, Elected Members and Council Officials.
- 4.2 Despite repeated assurances that work would be undertaken to fully secure the site, it has remained possible for the public to access the site. Warning signs advising not to enter, security fences and other works have not stopped people entering the site.
- 4.3 A statutory abatement notice was served on the owner of the property on 13<sup>th</sup> June 2016 under the Environmental Protection Act 1990. Despite some efforts by the owner, this notice has not been complied with as the property remains unsecured at certain locations.

- 4.4 The owner of the building visited the Community Safety Hub on Wednesday 29<sup>th</sup> June 2016 and met with Officers from the Council. An on-site meeting was arranged for Wednesday 6th July 2016.
- 4.5 Despite assurances given and weekly contact being maintained with the owner of the site, no major works have started on the site and the site remains accessible for entry by members of the public.
- 4.6 Since the service of the statutory abatement notice, the Council has been assessing the cost of potentially securing the site fully. Initial costs of up to £100k have now been obtained to completely secure the site i.e. brick up all windows and doors and this is noted to be cost prohibitive. Works on this scale would require listed building consent to be granted, which is also not certain to be granted.
- 4.7 Several meetings have been held between representatives from the Council and 2 residents from the Residents Committee (Residents Action Initiative) on 10 & 31 August 2016 respectively. At this time, the residents were advised of the work undertaken to date and the limitations in action that Planning and Building Control could undertake.
- 4.8 A fixed penalty notice of £400 was issued to the owner of the RAI on 1 September 2016. This is the maximum penalty that can be issued by the Council under the Environmental Protection Act 1990. At the same time the owner was informed that the Council would be taking action to secure the building and the site and the owner would be charged for the cost of any works to do this.
- 4.9 The Council initiated work on the RAI building in the week beginning 5 September 2016. This was in default of the statutory abatement notice and included the application of anti-vandal paint and the potential to secure the site to a higher standard.
- 4.10 An article on the RAI was published in the Paisley Daily Express on Thursday 8 September 2016 advising that Renfrewshire Council was taking legal action against the owner of the property. (This implies direct Court or legal action – which is not the case. The Council is in fact taking the action available to it under current enforcement legislation – which is not particularly useful or strong in cases of this nature).
- 4.11 The owner did instruct further work to secure the building on Thursday 8 September 2016. Due to the measures taken to the external fence, Council Officers were unable to access the site and to ascertain the level of any additional work undertaken to secure the building.
- 4.12 Further complaints of people entering the site have continued to be received and it is clear that members of the public have continued to access the building. As a result, further investigations were carried out at the end of September and the site was noted to be insecure and allowing access to members of the public.

- 4.13 Further work was undertaken by the Council in the week beginning 3 October 2016 to complete the application of anti-vandal paint, secure the entry points to the building (including the door) and repair the external fence to ensure it was secured to an appropriate standard. The situation continues to be subject to ongoing monitoring and review by all parties.

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### **Implications of the Report**

1. **Financial** – Costs for the work undertaken to date have been from the Community Resources mainstream budget, however, they will be charged back to the owner of the site. There is the potential for Community Resources to be required to continually secure the site which will become cost prohibitive.

Renfrewshire Council, Police Scotland and Scottish Fire and Rescue are visiting the site on a regular basis which is a financial resource.

2. **HR & Organisational Development** – none
3. **Community Care, Health & Well-being** – the derelict building is having an impact of the well-being of the affected residents.
4. **Legal** – All legal and legislative powers have been assessed and exhausted by both Community Safety and Legal Services for this property.
5. **Property/Assets**-none
6. **Information Technology** - none
7. **Equality & Human Rights** - There are no impacts on equality and human rights as part of this paper.
8. **Health & Safety** – none
9. **Procurement** – none
10. **Risk** – none
11. **Privacy Impact** - none

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**List of Background Papers** none

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